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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Housing Service

**Notice of Solicitation of Applications for the Rural Community
Development Initiative for Fiscal Year 2015**

AGENCY: Rural Housing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Rural Housing Service (RHS), an agency within the USDA Rural Development mission area herein referred to as the Agency announces the acceptance of applications under the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) program. Applicants must provide matching funds in an amount at least equal to the Federal grant. These grants will be made to qualified intermediary organizations that will provide financial and technical assistance to recipients to develop their capacity and ability to undertake projects related to housing, community facilities, or community and economic development that will support the community.

This Notice lists the information needed to submit an application for these funds. This Notice contains revised evaluation criteria that are streamlined, in order to enhance program efficiency and delivery.

DATES: The deadline for receipt of an application is 4 p.m. local time, [INSERT DATE 90 days FROM DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE **FEDERAL REGISTER**]. The application date and time are firm. The Agency will not consider any application received after the deadline. Applicants intending to mail applications must provide sufficient time to permit delivery on or before the closing deadline date and time. Acceptance by the United States Postal Service or private mailer does not constitute delivery. Facsimile (FAX) and postage due applications will not be accepted.

ADDRESSES: Entities wishing to apply for assistance may download the application documents and requirements delineated in this Notice from the RCDI Web site: <http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-community-development-initiative-grants> .

Application information for electronic submissions may be found at <http://www.grants.gov>.

Applicants may also request paper application packages from the Rural Development office in their state. A list of Rural Development State offices can be found via http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RCDI_State_Contacts.pdf.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The Rural Development office for the state in which the applicant is located. A list of Rural Development State Office contacts is provided at the following link: http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RCDI_State_Contacts.pdf.

Paperwork Reduction Act

The paperwork burden has been cleared by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under OMB Control Number 0575-0180.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Overview

Federal Agency: Rural Housing Service.

Funding Opportunity Title: Rural Community Development

Initiative.

Announcement Type: Initial Announcement.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.446.

Dates: The deadline for receipt of an application is 4 p.m.

local time, [INSERT DATE 90 days FROM DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE

FEDERAL REGISTER]. The application date and time are firm. The Agency

will not consider any application received after the deadline.

Applicants intending to mail applications must provide sufficient time to permit delivery on or before the closing deadline date and time.

Acceptance by the United States Postal Service or private mailer does not constitute delivery. Facsimile (FAX) and postage due applications will not be accepted.

A. Program Description

Congress first authorized the RCDI in 1999 (Pub. L. 106-78, which was amended most recently by The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (Pub. L. 113-235)). The RCDI was authorized to develop the capacity and ability of qualified private, nonprofit community-based housing and community development organizations, low-income rural communities, and federally recognized Native American Tribes to undertake projects related to housing, community facilities, or community and economic development in rural areas. Strengthening the recipient's capacity in these areas will benefit the communities they serve. The RCDI structure requires the intermediary (grantee) to provide a program of financial and technical assistance to recipients.

The recipients will, in turn, provide programs to their communities (beneficiaries).

Of particular note this year, the Agency is encouraging applications for projects based in or servicing high poverty areas. This emphasis will support Rural Development's (RD) mission of improving the quality of life for rural Americans and commitment to directing resources to those who most need them.

B. Federal Award Information

Congress, in The Continuing and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (Pub.L. 113-235), appropriated \$4,000,000 in FY 2015 for the RCDI program. The amount of funding received in the FY 2015 Appropriations Act can also be found at the following link:

<http://www.rd.usda.gov/newsroom/notices-solicitation-applications-nosas#nosa>.

Qualified private, nonprofit and public (including tribal) intermediary organizations proposing to carry out financial and technical assistance programs will be eligible to receive the grant funding.

The intermediary will be required to provide matching funds in an amount at least equal to the RCDI grant.

A grant will be the type of assistance instrument awarded to successful applications.

The respective minimum and maximum grant amount per intermediary is \$50,000 and \$250,000.

Grant funds must be utilized within 3 years from date of the award.

A grantee that has an outstanding RCDI grant over 3 years old, as of the application due date in this Notice, is not eligible to apply for this round of funding.

The intermediary must provide a program of financial and technical assistance to one or more of the following: a private, nonprofit community-based housing and development organization, a low-income rural community or a federally recognized tribe.

C. Eligibility Information

Applicants must meet all of the following eligibility requirements by the application deadline. Applications which fail to meet any of these requirements by the application deadline will be deemed ineligible and will not be evaluated further, and will not receive a Federal award.

1. Eligible Applicants

(a) Qualified private, nonprofit, (including faith-based and community organizations and philanthropic foundations), in accordance with 7 CFR part 16, and public (including tribal) intermediary organizations are eligible applicants. Definitions that describe eligible organizations and other key terms are listed below.

(b) The recipient must be a nonprofit community-based housing and development organization, low-income rural community, or federally recognized tribe based on the RCDI definitions of these groups.

(c) Private nonprofit, faith or community-based organizations must provide a certificate of incorporation and good standing from the Secretary of the State of incorporation, or other similar and valid documentation of nonprofit status. For low-income rural community recipients, the Agency requires evidence that the entity is a public body and census data verifying that the median household income of the community where the office receiving the financial and technical

assistance is located is at, or below, 80 percent of the State or national median household income, whichever is higher. For federally recognized tribes, the Agency needs the page listing their name from the current Federal Register list of tribal entities recognized and eligible for funding services (see the definition of federally recognized tribes in this Notice for details on this list).

(d) Any corporation (1) that has been convicted of a felony criminal violation under any Federal law within the past 24 months or (2) that has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability; is not eligible for financial assistance provided with funds appropriated by the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, unless a Federal agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and has made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

There is a matching requirement of at least equal to the amount of the grant. If this matching funds requirement is not met, the application will be deemed ineligible. See section D, Application and Submission Information, for required pre-award and post award matching funds documentation submission.

The intermediary must provide matching funds at least equal to the amount of the grant. Verification of matching funds must be submitted with the application. Matching funds must be committed for a period equal to the grant performance period. The intermediary will be required to provide matching funds in an amount at least equal to the

RCDI grant. In-kind contributions such as salaries, donated time and effort, real and nonexpendable personal property and goods and services cannot be used as matching funds.

Matching funds are cash or confirmed funding commitments and must be at least equal to the grant amount and committed for a period of not less than the grant performance period. These funds can only be used for eligible RCDI activities. Matching funds must be used to support the overall purpose of the RCDI program.

In-kind contributions such as salaries, donated time and effort, real and nonexpendable personal property and goods and services cannot be used as matching funds.

Grant funds and matching funds must be used in equal proportions. This does not mean funds have to be used equally by line item.

The request for advance or reimbursement and supporting documentation must show that RCDI fund usage does not exceed the cumulative amount of matching funds used.

Grant funds will be disbursed pursuant to relevant provisions of 2 CFR Parts 200 and 400. Verification of matching funds must be submitted with the application. See Section D, other program requirements, for matching funds documentation and pre-award requirements.

The intermediary is responsible for demonstrating that matching funds are available, and committed for a period of not less than the grant performance period to the RCDI proposal. Matching funds may be provided by the intermediary or a third party. Other Federal funds may be used as matching funds if authorized by statute and the purpose of the funds is an eligible RCDI purpose.

RCDI funds will be disbursed on an advance or reimbursement basis. Matching funds cannot be expended prior to execution of the RCDI Grant Agreement.

3. Other Program Requirements

(a) The recipient and beneficiary, but not the intermediary, must be located in an eligible rural area. The physical location of the recipient's office that will be receiving the financial and technical assistance must be in an eligible rural area. If the recipient is a low-income community, the median household income of the area where the office is located must be at or below 80 percent of the State or national median household income, whichever is higher. The applicable Rural Development State Office can assist in determining the eligibility of an area.

A listing of Rural Development State Office contacts can be found at the following link:

http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RCDI_State_Contacts.pdf. A map showing eligible rural areas can be found at the following link:

<http://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do?pageAction=RBSmenu&NavKey=property@13>.

(b) RCDI grantees that have an outstanding grant over 3 years old, as of the application due date in this Notice, will not be eligible to apply for this round of funding. Grant and matching funds must be utilized in a timely manner to ensure that the goals and objectives of the program are met.

(c) Individuals cannot be recipients.

(d) The intermediary must provide a program of financial and technical assistance to the recipient.

(e) The intermediary organization must have been legally organized for a minimum of 3 years and have at least 3 years prior

experience working with private nonprofit community-based housing and development organizations, low-income rural communities, or tribal organizations in the areas of housing, community facilities, or community and economic development.

(f) Proposals must be structured to utilize the grant funds within 3 years from the date of the award.

(g) Each applicant, whether singularly or jointly, may only submit one application for RCDI funds under this Notice. This restriction does not preclude the applicant from providing matching funds for other applications.

(h) Recipients can benefit from more than one RCDI application; however, after grant selections are made, the recipient can only benefit from multiple RCDI grants if the type of financial and technical assistance the recipient will receive is not duplicative. The services described in multiple RCDI grant applications must have separate and identifiable accounts for compliance purposes.

(i) The intermediary and the recipient cannot be the same entity. The recipient can be a related entity to the intermediary, if it meets the definition of a recipient, provided the relationship does not create a Conflict of Interest that cannot be resolved to Rural Development's satisfaction.

(j) If the recipient is a low-income rural community, identify the unit of government to which the financial and technical assistance will be provided, e.g., town council or village board. The financial and technical assistance must be provided to the organized unit of government representing that community, not the community at large.

4. Eligible Grant Purposes

Fund uses must be consistent with the RCDI purpose. A nonexclusive list of eligible grant uses includes the following:

(a) Provide technical assistance to develop recipients' capacity and ability to undertake projects related to housing, community facilities, or community and economic development, e.g., the intermediary hires a staff person to provide technical assistance to the recipient or the recipient hires a staff person, under the supervision of the intermediary, to carry out the technical assistance provided by the intermediary.

(b) Develop the capacity of recipients to conduct community development programs, e.g., homeownership education or training for business entrepreneurs.

(c) Develop the capacity of recipients to conduct development initiatives, e.g., programs that support micro-enterprise and sustainable development.

(d) Develop the capacity of recipients to increase their leveraging ability and access to alternative funding sources by providing training and staffing.

(e) Develop the capacity of recipients to provide the technical assistance component for essential community facilities projects.

(f) Assist recipients in completing pre-development requirements for housing, community facilities, or community and economic development projects by providing resources for professional services, e.g., architectural, engineering, or legal.

(g) Improve recipient's organizational capacity by providing training and resource material on developing strategic plans, board operations, management, financial systems, and information technology.

(h) Purchase of computers, software, and printers, limited to \$10,000 per award, at the recipient level when directly related to the technical assistance program being undertaken by the intermediary.

(i) Provide funds to recipients for training-related travel costs and training expenses related to RCDI.

5. Ineligible Fund Uses

The following is a list of ineligible grant uses:

- (a) Pass-through grants, and any funds provided to the recipient in a lump sum that are not reimbursements.
- (b) Funding a revolving loan fund (RLF).
- (c) Construction (in any form).
- (d) Salaries for positions involved in construction, renovations, rehabilitation, and any oversight of these types of activities.
- (e) Intermediary preparation of strategic plans for recipients.
- (f) Funding prostitution, gambling, or any illegal activities.
- (g) Grants to individuals.
- (h) Funding a grant where there may be a conflict of interest, or an appearance of a conflict of interest, involving any action by the Agency.
- (i) Paying obligations incurred before the beginning date without prior Agency approval or after the ending date of the grant agreement.
- (j) Purchasing real estate.
- (k) Improvement or renovation of the grantee's, or recipient's office space or for the repair or maintenance of privately owned vehicles.
- (l) Any purpose prohibited in 2 CFR Part 200 or 400.
- (m) Using funds for recipient's general operating costs.
- (n) Using grant or matching funds for Individual Development Accounts.

(o) Purchasing vehicles.

6. Program Examples and Restrictions

The following are examples of eligible and ineligible purposes under the RCDI program. (These examples are illustrative and are not meant to limit the activities proposed in the application. Activities that meet the objectives of the RCDI program and meet the criteria outlined in this Notice will be considered eligible.)

(a) The intermediary must work directly with the recipient, not the ultimate beneficiaries. As an example:

The intermediary provides training to the recipient on how to conduct homeownership education classes. The recipient then provides ongoing homeownership education to the residents of the community--the ultimate beneficiaries. This "train the trainer" concept fully meets the intent of this initiative. The intermediary is providing technical assistance that will build the recipient's capacity by enabling them to conduct homeownership education classes for the public.

This is an eligible purpose. However, if the intermediary directly provided homeownership education classes to individuals in the recipient's service area, this would not be an eligible purpose because the recipient would be bypassed.

(b) If the intermediary is working with a low-income community as the recipient, the intermediary must provide the technical assistance to the entity that represents the low-income community and is identified in the application. Examples of entities representing a low-income community are a village board or a town council.

If the intermediary provides technical assistance to the Board of the low-income community on how to establish a cooperative, this would be an eligible purpose. However, if the intermediary works directly

with individuals from the community to establish the cooperative, this is not an eligible purpose.

The recipient's capacity is built by learning skills that will enable them to support sustainable economic development in their communities on an ongoing basis.

(c) The intermediary may provide technical assistance to the recipient on how to create and operate a revolving loan fund. The intermediary may not monitor or operate the revolving loan fund. RCDI funds, including matching funds, cannot be used to fund revolving loan funds.

(d) The intermediary may work with recipients in building their capacity to provide planning and leadership development training. The recipients of this training would be expected to assume leadership roles in the development and execution of regional strategic plans. The intermediary would work with multiple recipients in helping communities recognize their connections to the greater regional and national economies.

(e) The intermediary could provide training and technical assistance to the recipients on developing emergency shelter and feeding, short-term housing, search and rescue, and environmental accident, prevention, and cleanup program plans. For longer term disaster and economic crisis responses, the intermediary could work with the recipients to develop job placement and training programs, and develop coordinated transit systems for displaced workers.

D. Application and Submission Information

1. Address to Request Application Package

Entities wishing to apply for assistance may download the application documents and requirements delineated in this Notice from

the RCDI Web site: <http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-community-development-initiative-grants>.

Application information for electronic submissions may be found at <http://www.grants.gov>.

Applicants may also request paper application packages from the Rural Development office in their state. A list of Rural Development State office contacts can be found via http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RCDI_State_Contacts.pdf. You may also obtain a copy by calling 202-205-9685.

2. Content and Form of Application Submission

If the applicant is ineligible or the application is incomplete, the Agency will inform the applicant in writing of the decision, reasons therefore, and its appeal rights and no further evaluation of the application will occur.

A complete application for RCDI funds must include the following:

(a) A summary page, double-spaced between items, listing the following: (This information should not be presented in narrative form.)

- (1) Applicant's name,
- (2) Applicant's address,
- (3) Applicant's telephone number,
- (4) Name of applicant's contact person and telephone number,
- (5) Applicant's fax number,
- (6) County where applicant is located,
- (7) Congressional district number where applicant is located,
- (8) Amount of grant request, and
- (9) Number of recipients.

(b) A detailed Table of Contents containing page numbers for each component of the application.

(c) A project overview, no longer than five pages, including the following items, which will also be addressed separately and in detail under "Building Capacity and Expertise" of the "Evaluation Criteria."

(1) The type of technical assistance to be provided to the recipients and how it will be implemented.

(2) How the capacity and ability of the recipients will be improved.

(3) The overall goals to be accomplished.

(4) The benchmarks to be used to measure the success of the program. Benchmarks should be specific and quantifiable.

(d) Organizational documents, such as a certificate of incorporation and a current good standing certification from the Secretary of State where the applicant is incorporated and other similar and valid documentation of non-profit status, from the intermediary that confirms it has been legally organized for a minimum of 3 years as the applicant entity.

(e) Verification of source and amount of matching funds, e.g., a copy of a bank statement if matching funds are in cash or a copy of the confirmed funding commitment from the funding source.

The verification must show that matching funds are available for the duration of the grant performance period. The verification of matching funds must be submitted with the application or the application will be considered incomplete.

The applicant will be contacted by the Agency prior to grant award to verify that the matching funds provided with the application continue to be available. The applicant will have 15 days from the date contacted to submit verification that matching funds continue to be available.

If the applicant is unable to provide the verification within that timeframe, the application will be considered ineligible. The applicant must maintain bank statements on file or other documentation for a period of at least 3 years after grant closing except that the records shall be retained beyond the 3-year period if audit findings have not been resolved.

(f) The following information for each recipient:

- (1) Recipient's entity name,
- (2) Complete address (mailing and physical location, if different),
- (3) County where located,
- (4) Number of Congressional district where recipient is located,
- (5) Contact person's name and telephone number, and
- (6) Form RD 400-4, "Assurance Agreement." If the Form RD 400-4 is not submitted for a recipient, the recipient will be considered ineligible. No information pertaining to that recipient will be included in the income or population scoring criteria and the requested funding may be adjusted due to the deletion of the recipient.

(g) Submit evidence that each recipient entity is eligible. Documentation must be submitted to verify recipient eligibility.

Acceptable documentation varies depending on the type of recipient:

- (1) Nonprofits--provide a current valid letter confirming non-profit status from the Secretary of the State of incorporation or the IRS, a current good standing certification from the Secretary of the State of incorporation, or other valid documentation of nonprofit status of each recipient. A nonprofit recipient must provide evidence that it is a valid nonprofit when the intermediary applies for the RCDI

grant. Organizations with pending requests for nonprofit designations are not eligible.

(2) Low-income rural community--provide evidence the entity is a public body, and a copy of the 2010 census data to verify the population, and evidence that the median household income is at, or below, 80 percent of either the State or national median household income. We will only accept data and printouts from <http://www.census.gov>.

(3) Federally recognized tribes--provide the page listing their name from the **Federal Register** list of tribal entities published most recently by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The 2014 list is available at 79 FR 4748-53 and <http://www.bia.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/text/idc006989>.

(h) Each of the "Evaluation Criteria" must be addressed specifically and individually by category. Present these criteria in narrative form. Documentation must be limited to three pages per criterion. The "Population and Income" criteria for recipient locations can be provided in the form of a list; however, the source of the data must be included on the page(s).

(i) A timeline identifying specific activities and proposed dates for completion.

(j) A detailed project budget that includes the RCDI grant amount and matching funds. This should be a line-item budget, by category. Categories such as salaries, administrative, other, and indirect costs that pertain to the proposed project must be clearly defined. Supporting documentation listing the components of these categories must be included. The budget should be dated: year 1, year 2, year 3, as applicable.

(k) The indirect cost category in the project budget should be used only when a grant applicant has a federally negotiated indirect cost rate. A copy of the current rate agreement must be provided with the application. Non-federal entities that have never received a negotiated indirect cost rate may use the de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC).

(l) Form SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance." (Do not complete Form SF-424A, "Budget Information." A separate line-item budget should be presented as described in No. 13 of this section.)

(m) Form SF-424B, "Assurances--Non-Construction Programs."

(n) Form AD-1047, "Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and Other Responsibility Matters--Primary Covered Transactions."

(o) Form AD-1048, "Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion--Lower Tier Covered Transactions."

(p) Form AD-1049, "Certification Regarding Drug-Free Workplace Requirements."

(q) Certification of Non-Lobbying Activities.

(r) Standard Form LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," if applicable.

(s) Form RD 400-4, "Assurance Agreement," for the applicant.

(t) Identify and report any association or relationship with Rural Development employees. (A statement acknowledging whether or not a relationship exists is required).

(u) Form AD-3030, "Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants," if you are a corporation. A corporation is any entity that has filed articles of incorporation in one of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the

Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, or the various territories of the United States including American Samoa, Guam, Midway Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands. Corporations include both for profit and non-profit entities.

3. Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) and System for Awards Management (SAM)

Grant applicants must obtain a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and register in the System for Award Management (SAM) prior to submitting a pre-application pursuant to 2 CFR 25.200(b). In addition, an entity applicant must maintain registration in SAM at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under construction by the Agency. Similarly, all recipients of Federal financial assistance are required to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation in accordance to 2 CFR part 170. So long as an entity applicant does not have an exception under 2 CFR 170.110(b), the applicant must have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the reporting requirements should the applicant receive funding. See 2 CFR 170.200(b).

An applicant, unless excepted under 2 CFR 25.110(b), (c), or (d), is required to:

- (a) Be registered in SAM before submitting its application;
- (b) Provide a valid DUNS number in its application; and
- (c) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

The Federal awarding agency may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable DUNS and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the Federal awarding agency is ready to make a Federal award, the Federal awarding agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

As required by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), all grant applications must provide a DUNS number when applying for Federal grants, on or after October 1, 2003. Organizations can receive a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free number at 1-866-705-5711 or via Internet at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>. Additional information concerning this requirement can be obtained on the Grants.gov Web Site at <http://www.grants.gov>. Similarly, applicants may register for SAM at <https://www.sam.gov> or by calling 1-866-606-8220.

The DUNS number should be identified in the "Organizational DUNS" field on Standard Form (SF) 424, "Application for Federal Assistance." Since there are no specific fields for a Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) code and expiration date, they may be identified anywhere on the Form SF 424. If the applicant does not provide the CAGE code and expiration date and the DUNS number in the application, it will not be considered for funding. The required forms and certifications can be downloaded from the RCDI Web site at:
<http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-community-development-initiative-grants>.

4. Submission Dates and Times

The deadline for receipt of an application is 4 p.m. local time, [INSERT DATE 90 days FROM DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE **FEDERAL REGISTER**]. The application date and time are firm. The Agency will not consider any application received after the deadline. You may submit your application in paper form or electronically through Grants.gov. Applicants intending to mail applications must provide sufficient time to permit delivery on or before the closing deadline date and time. Acceptance by the United States Postal Service or private mailer does not constitute delivery. Facsimile (FAX) and postage due applications will not be accepted.

To submit a paper application, the original application package must be submitted to the Rural Development State Office where the applicant's headquarters is located. A listing of Rural Development State Offices can be found via http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RCDI_State_Contacts.pdf.

Applications will not be accepted via FAX or electronic mail.

Applicants may file an electronic application at <http://www.grants.gov>. Grants.gov contains full instructions on all required passwords, credentialing, and software. Follow the instructions at Grants.gov for registering and submitting an electronic application. If a system problem or technical difficulty occurs with an electronic application, please use the customer support resources available at the Grants.gov Web site.

Technical difficulties submitting an application through Grants.gov will not be a reason to extend the application deadline. If an application is unable to be submitted through Grants.gov, a paper application must be received in the appropriate Rural Development State Office by the deadline noted previously.

First time Grants.gov users should carefully read and follow the registration steps listed on the Web site. These steps need to be initiated early in the application process to avoid delays in submitting your application online.

In order to register with System for Award Management (SAM), your organization will need a DUNS number. Be sure to complete the Marketing Partner ID (MPID) and Electronic Business Primary Point of Contact fields during the SAM registration process.

These are mandatory fields that are required when submitting grant applications through Grants.gov. Additional application instructions for submitting an electronic application can be found by selecting this funding opportunity on Grants.gov.

5. Funding Restrictions

Meeting expenses. In accordance with 31 U.S.C. 1345, "Expenses of Meetings," appropriations may not be used for travel, transportation, and subsistence expenses for a meeting. RCDI grant funds cannot be used for these meeting-related expenses. Matching funds may, however, be used to pay for these expenses.

RCDI funds may be used to pay for a speaker as part of a program, equipment to facilitate the program, and the actual room that will house the meeting.

RCDI funds cannot be used for meetings; they can, however, be used for travel, transportation, or subsistence expenses for program-related training and technical assistance purposes. Any training not delineated in the application must be approved by the Agency to verify compliance with 31 U.S.C. 1345. Travel and per diem expenses (including meals and incidental expenses) will be allowed in accordance with 2 CFR parts 200 and 400.

E. Application Review Information

1. Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated using the following criteria and weights:

(a) Building Capacity and Expertise -- Maximum 40 Points

The applicant must demonstrate how they will improve the recipients' capacity, through a program of financial and technical assistance, as it relates to the RCDI purposes.

Capacity-building financial and technical assistance should provide new functions to the recipients or expand existing functions that will enable the recipients to undertake projects in the areas of housing, community facilities, or community and economic development that will benefit the community. Capacity-building financial and technical assistance may include, but is not limited to: training to conduct community development programs, e.g., homeownership education, or the establishment of minority business entrepreneurs, cooperatives, or micro-enterprises; organizational development, e.g., assistance to develop or improve board operations, management, and financial systems; instruction on how to develop and implement a strategic plan; instruction on how to access alternative funding sources to increase leveraging opportunities; staffing, e.g., hiring a person at intermediary or recipient level to provide technical assistance to recipients.

The program of financial and technical assistance that is to be provided, its delivery, and the measurability of the program's effectiveness will determine the merit of the application.

All applications will be competitively ranked with the applications providing the most improvement in capacity development and measurable activities being ranked the highest.

The narrative response must contain the following items. This list also contains the points for each item.

(1) Describe the nature of financial and technical assistance to be provided to the recipients and the activities that will be conducted to deliver the technical assistance; (10 Points)

(2) Explain how financial and technical assistance will develop or increase the recipient's capacity. Indicate whether a new function is being developed or if existing functions are being expanded or performed more effectively; (7 Points)

(3) Identify which RCDI purpose areas will be addressed with this assistance: housing, community facilities, or community and economic development; (3 Points)

(4) Describe how the results of the technical assistance will be measured. What benchmarks will be used to measure effectiveness? Benchmarks should be specific and quantifiable; (5 Points)

(5) Demonstrate that it has conducted programs of financial and technical assistance and achieved measurable results in the areas of housing, community facilities, or community and economic development in rural areas. (10 Points)

(6) Provide the name, contact information, and the type and amount of the financial and technical assistance the applicant organization has provided to the following for the last 3 years: (5 Points)

(i) Nonprofit organizations in rural areas.

(ii) Low-income communities in rural areas (also include the type of entity, e.g., city government, town council, or village board).

(iii) Federally recognized tribes or any other culturally diverse organizations.

(b) Soundness of Approach -- Maximum 15 Points

The applicant can receive up to 15 points for soundness of approach. The overall proposal will be considered under this criterion. Applicants must list the page numbers in the application that address these factors.

The maximum 15 points for this criterion will be based on the following:

(1) The proposal fits the objectives for which applications were invited, is clearly stated, and the applicant has defined how this proposal will be implemented. (7 Points)

(2) The ability to provide the proposed financial and technical assistance based on prior accomplishments. (6 Points)

(3) Cost effectiveness will be evaluated based on the budget in the application. The proposed grant amount and matching funds should be utilized to maximize capacity building at the recipient level. (2 Points)

(c) Population and Income -- Maximum 15 Points

Population is based on the average population from the 2010 census data for the communities in which the recipients are located. The physical address, not mailing address, for each recipient must be used for this criterion. Community is defined for scoring purposes as a city, town, village, county, parish, borough, or census-designated place where the recipient's office is physically located.

The applicant must submit the census data from the following Web site in the form of a printout of the applicable "Fact Sheet" to verify the population figures used for each recipient. The data can be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.census.gov>; click on "American FactFinder," fill in field and click "Go"; the name and population data for each recipient location must be listed in this section.

The average population of the recipient locations will be used and will be scored as follows:

Population	Scoring (points)
10,000 or less	5
10,001 to 20,000	4
20,001 to 30,000	3
30,001 to 40,000	2
40,001 to 50,000	1

The average of the median household income for the communities where the recipients are physically located will determine the points awarded. The physical address, not mailing address, for each recipient must be used for this criterion. Applicants may compare the average recipient median household income to the State median household income or the national median household income, whichever yields the most points. The national median household income to be used is \$51,914.

The applicant must submit the income data in the form of a printout of the applicable information from the following Web site to verify the income for each recipient.

The data being used is from the 2010 census. The data can be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.census.gov>; click on "American FactFinder," fill in field and click "Go"; the name and income data for each recipient location must be listed in this section. Points will be awarded as follows:

Scoring

Average Recipient Median Income (points)

Less than or equal to 70 percent of state or national median household income	10
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Greater than 70, but less than or equal to 80 percent of state or national median household income	5
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In excess of 80 percent of state or national median household Income	0
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(d) State Director's Points Based on Project Merit -- Maximum 10 Points

(1) This criterion will be addressed by the Agency, not the applicant.

(2) Up to 10 points may be awarded by the Rural Development State Director to any application(s) that benefits their state regardless of whether the applicant is headquartered in their state. The total points awarded under this criterion, to all applications, will not exceed 10.

(3) When an intermediary submits an application that will benefit a state that is not the same as the state in which the intermediary is headquartered, it is the intermediary's responsibility to notify the State Director of the state which is receiving the benefit of their application. In such cases, State Directors awarding points to applications benefiting their state must notify the reviewing state in writing.

(4) Assignment of any points under this criterion requires a written justification and must be tied to and awarded based on how closely the application aligns with the Rural Development State Office's strategic goals.

(e) Support of Agency's Strategic Goals -- Maximum 20 Points

This criterion will be addressed by the Agency, not the applicant. The Agency Administrator may award up to 20 points to any application to the extent that the application supports Strategic Goal One in the USDA Strategic Plan 2014-2018. This plan can be found at the following link: www.usda.gov/documents/usda-strategic-plan-fy-2014-2018.pdf.

Points may be awarded to applications that meet at least one of the following six criteria below (note: the maximum points can be given to any one of the following six criteria):

(1) The project is based in a census tract with poverty greater than or equal to 20%;

(2) The project is based in a community (village, town, city, or Census Designated Place) that is 75% CF grant eligible (rural community having a population of 5,000 or less and median household income (MHI) of 60% or less of the state's non-metropolitan median household income (NMHI);

(3) The project's service area includes at least one census tract with poverty greater than or equal to 20%;

(4) The project's service area includes at least one community (village, town, city, or Census Designated Place) that is 75% CF grant eligible (rural community having a population of 5,000 or less and MHI of 60% or less of the state's NMHI);

(5) The project serves a Strikeforce area (see link below).

(6) The project serves a Promise Zone (see link below) and eligible applicant provides evidence of partnership with a Promise Zone Lead Applicant organization.

For a listing of StrikeForce areas and designated Promise Zones, click on the following link:

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=STRIKE_FORCE, then

click the StrikeForce or Promise Zones button from the left menu. For a mapping tool identifying census tracts with poverty greater than or equal to 20 percent, click on the following link:

<http://rdgdwe.sc.egov.usda.gov/rdpoverty/index.html>

2. Review and Selection Process

(a) Rating and ranking.

Applications will be rated and ranked on a national basis by a review panel based on the "Evaluation Criteria" contained in this Notice.

If there is a tied score after the applications have been rated and ranked, the tie will be resolved by reviewing the scores for "Building Capacity and Expertise" and the applicant with the highest score in that category will receive a higher ranking. If the scores for "Building Capacity and Expertise" are the same, the scores will be compared for the next criterion, in sequential order, until one highest score can be determined.

(b) Initial screening.

The Agency will screen each application to determine eligibility during the period immediately following the application deadline. Listed below are examples of reasons for rejection from previous funding rounds. The following reasons for rejection are not all inclusive; however, they represent the majority of the applications previously rejected.

(1) Recipients were not located in eligible rural areas based on the definition in this Notice.

(2) Applicants failed to provide evidence of recipient's status, i.e., documentation supporting nonprofit evidence of organization.

(3) Applicants failed to provide evidence of committed matching funds or matching funds were not committed for a period at least equal to the grant performance period.

(4) Application did not follow the RCDI structure with an intermediary and recipients.

(5) Recipients were not identified in the application.

(6) Intermediary did not provide evidence it had been incorporated for at least 3 years as the applicant entity.

(7) Applicants failed to address the "Evaluation Criteria."

(8) The purpose of the proposal did not qualify as an eligible RCDI purpose.

(9) Inappropriate use of funds (e.g., construction or renovations).

(10) The applicant proposed providing financial and technical assistance directly to individuals.

(11) The application package was not received by closing date and time.

F. Federal Award Administration Information

1. Federal Award Notice

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official of the Agency shall make grants in ranked order to eligible applicants under the procedures set forth in this Notice.

Successful applicants will receive a selection letter by mail containing instructions on requirements necessary to proceed with execution and performance of the award. This letter is not an authorization to begin performance. In addition, selected applicants will be requested to verify that components of the application have not

changed at the time of selection and on the award obligation date, if requested by the Agency.

The award is not approved until all information has been verified, and the awarding official of the Agency has signed Form RD 1940-1, "Request for Obligation of Funds" and the grant agreement.

Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification including appeal rights by mail.

2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Grantees will be required to do the following:

(a) Execute a Rural Community Development Initiative Grant Agreement.

(b) Execute Form RD 1940-1, "Request for Obligation of Funds."

(c) Use Form SF 270, "Request for Advance or Reimbursement," to request reimbursements. Provide receipts for expenditures, timesheets and any other documentation to support the request for reimbursement.

(d) Provide financial status and project performance reports on a quarterly basis starting with the first full quarter after the grant award.

(e) Maintain a financial management system that is acceptable to the Agency.

(f) Ensure that records are maintained to document all activities and expenditures utilizing RCDI grant funds and matching funds. Receipts for expenditures will be included in this documentation.

(g) Provide annual audits or management reports on Form RD 442-2, "Statement of Budget, Income and Equity," and Form RD 442-3, "Balance Sheet," depending on the amount of Federal funds expended and the outstanding balance.

(h) Collect and maintain data provided by recipients on race, sex, and national origin and ensure recipients collect and maintain the same data on beneficiaries. Race and ethnicity data will be collected in accordance with OMB Federal Register notice, "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," (62 FR 58782), October 30, 1997. Sex data will be collected in accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. These items should not be submitted with the application but should be available upon request by the Agency.

(i) Provide a final project performance report.

(j) Identify and report any association or relationship with Rural Development employees.

(k) The intermediary and recipient must comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Executive Order 12250, and 7 CFR part 1901, subpart E.

(l) The grantee must comply with policies, guidance, and requirements as described in the following applicable Code of Federal Regulations, and any successor regulations:

(i) 2 CFR Parts 200 and 400 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements For Federal Awards).

(ii) 2 CFR parts 417 and 180 (Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement))

(m) Form AD-3031, "Assurance Regarding Felony Conviction or Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants," Must be signed by corporate applicants who receive an award under this Notice.

3. Reporting

After grant approval and through grant completion, you will be required to provide the following, as indicated in the Grant Agreement:

(a) SF-425, "Federal Financial Report" and SF-PPR, "Performance Progress Report" will be required on a quarterly basis (due 30 working days after each calendar quarter). The Performance Progress Report shall include the elements described in the grant agreement.

(b) Final financial and performance reports will be due 90 calendar days after the period of performance end date.

(c) A summary at the end of the final report with elements as described in the grant agreement to assist in documenting the annual performance goals of the RCDI program for Congress.

G. Federal Awarding Agency Contact

Contact the Rural Development office in the State where the applicant's headquarters is located. A list of Rural Development State Offices can be found via http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RCDI_State_Contacts.pdf.

H. Other Information

Survey on Ensuring Equal Opportunity for Applicants, OMB No. 1894-0010 (applies only to nonprofit applicants only - submission is optional).

No reimbursement will be made for any funds expended prior to execution of the RCDI Grant Agreement unless the intermediary is a non-profit or educational entity and has requested and received written Agency approval of the costs prior to the actual expenditure.

This exception is applicable for up to 90 days prior to grant closing and only applies to grantees that have received written approval but have not executed the RCDI Grant Agreement.

The Agency cannot retroactively approve reimbursement for expenditures prior to execution of the RCDI Grant Agreement.

Program Definitions

Agency--The Rural Housing Service (RHS) or its successor.

Beneficiary--Entities or individuals that receive benefits from assistance provided by the recipient.

Capacity--The ability of a recipient to implement housing, community facilities, or community and economic development projects.

Conflict of interest -- A situation in which a person or entity has competing personal, professional, or financial interests that make it difficult for the person or business to act impartially. Regarding use of both grant and matching funds, Federal procurement standards prohibit transactions that involve a real or apparent conflict of interest for owners, employees, officers, agents, or their immediate family members having a financial or other interest in the outcome of the project; or that restrict open and free competition for unrestrained trade. Specifically, project funds may not be used for services or goods going to, or coming from, a person or entity with a real or apparent conflict of interest, including, but not limited to, owner(s) and their immediate family members. An example of conflict of interest occurs when the grantee's employees, board of directors, or the immediate family of either, have the appearance of a professional or personal financial interest in the recipients receiving the benefits or services of the grant.

Federally recognized tribes--Tribal entities recognized and eligible for funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, based on the most recent notice in the **Federal Register** published by

the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Tribally Designated Housing Entities are eligible RCDI recipients.

Financial assistance--Funds, not to exceed \$10,000 per award, used by the intermediary to purchase supplies and equipment to build the recipient's capacity.

Funds--The RCDI grant and matching money.

Intermediary--A qualified private, nonprofit (including faith-based and community organizations and philanthropic organizations), or public (including tribal) organization that provides financial and technical assistance to multiple recipients.

Low-income rural community--An authority, district, economic development authority, regional council, or unit of government representing an incorporated city, town, village, county, township, parish, or borough whose income is at or below 80 percent of either the state or national Median Household Income as measured by the 2010 Census.

Matching funds--Cash or confirmed funding commitments. Matching funds must be at least equal to the grant amount and committed for a period of not less than the grant performance period.

Recipient--The entity that receives the financial and technical assistance from the Intermediary. The recipient must be a nonprofit community-based housing and development organization, a low-income rural community or a federally recognized Tribe.

Rural and rural area--Any area other than (i) a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; and (ii) the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such city or town.

Technical assistance--Skilled help in improving the recipient's abilities in the areas of housing, community facilities, or community and economic development.

Non-Discrimination Policy

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

To File a Program Complaint

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#) (PDF), found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form.

You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Persons with Disabilities

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities and you wish to file either an EEO or program complaint please contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish).

Persons with disabilities who wish to file a program complaint, please see information above on how to contact us by mail directly or by email.

If you require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) please contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

Appeal Process

All adverse determinations regarding applicant eligibility and the awarding of points as part of the selection process are appealable pursuant to 7 CFR part 11. Instructions on the appeal process will be provided at the time an applicant is notified of the adverse decision.

In the event the applicant is awarded a grant that is less than the amount requested, the applicant will be required to modify its application to conform to the reduced amount before execution of the grant agreement. The Agency reserves the right to reduce or withdraw the award if acceptable modifications are not submitted by the awardee within 15 working days from the date the request for modification is made. Any modifications must be within the scope of the original application.

Dated: May 11, 2015.

Tony Hernandez,
Administrator,
Rural Housing Service.

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